

City Council Initiatives

2019 Year End Update

February 2020

The City Council adopted its Goals for 2019-2020 at the Regular City Council meeting of April 22, 2019. These Goals were stated within nine “Initiative” areas. Council directed that periodic reporting occur to provide status updates on progress on these initiatives. A progress update was provided on July 22, 2019. Council received the 2019 Annual Report, as amended, at the meeting of January 27, 2020. The following is a repagination of major accomplishments within these two earlier reports and the EDA Annual Report that relate directly to Council Initiatives. The 2019 Annual Report also addresses accomplishments in areas beyond these specific initiative areas.

- **Accessibility**

During 2019, it is probable that the City made more forward progress in this area than in any other single year in recent times with over 4 miles of ped facilities constructed. The projects completed during 2019 had been years in planning and garnering third party funding, but nonetheless, construction occurred during this most recent year. Planning approvals on additional projects also occurred. Included are:

1. \$6 MM Reconstruction of Wentworth Avenue. This County project includes about \$1.9 MM in City cost participation and benefit assessments plus a federal grant, which substantially funded new trailway construction between XXXX and Humboldt.
2. \$5.1 MM Reconstruction of Livingston Avenue. Reconstruction of this corridor, between Mendota Road and Thompson Avenue included completion of gaps in sidewalk infrastructure from Mendota to Wentworth. North of Wentworth is part of the \$6.7 MM County R2R project slated for 2020.
3. Construction of the \$2.4 MM Marie/Oakdale Trail (\$1.35 MM City cost). This project, as a collaborative with the County resulted in new trailway on Marie from Robert to Oakdale and on Oakdale from Mendota Road to Wentworth.
4. R2R Project Approvals. Approvals for this regional trailway occurred in both 2018 and 2019 with approval of an amended JPA with Dakota County approved by the City in December 2019. This approval, which was approved by the County Board in January 2020, addresses issues that had to be overcome for the R2R project to proceed. This project is scheduled for bidding in June 2020.
5. Acquisition of Wentworth Townhome property. This acquisition, which was approved and closed during the fourth quarter, 2019 addressed a couple different Council Initiatives. One of these, however, was the provision of 30 feet of R2R ROW addressed in the JPA noted above. The property also provides construction staging and R2R construction period access to an adjacent commercial entity
6. Approved a \$70,000 County/Developer funded crossing of Wentworth Avenue near Marthaler Lane as part of the DARTS/REE Senior Housing project at that location. While this was intended as a 2019, improvement construction has been delayed to 2020.

7. Receipt of SHIP (Statewide Health Improvement Partnership) Trail funding. The City received a grant during 2019 to provide for trail planning and predesign of Trailway on Thompson from Robert to Hwy 52 and on Oakdale from there to Butler. The plan, which will be completed during 2020, will enhance opportunities for the City and County to compete for third party funding going forward.
8. As part of the Development Agreement with Oppidan for a multi-family housing project on the former Thompson Oaks Golf Course, approved during 2019, the City set aside \$200,000 in abatement funding to pay toward trail and related project costs that will come out of the SHIP planning project
9. As part of the \$2 MM County Thompson Lake Reclamation project (\$144K City cost) the County constructed trailways surrounding the Lake
10. The Council adopted two policy changes relating to trailways and ped facilities. The first was to eliminate private property benefit assessments for trail projects and the second was adoption of a CIP amendment that directs \$500,000 in funding through the General Fund levy to create a sidewalk and trail fund starting in 2021.
11. The Dakota County Regional Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with East Metro Strong (transit planning non-profit) a County transit study was kicked off in August. Completion of that study will be early in 2020.

- **Blighted Properties**

An ongoing activity of the community has been to address owner occupied and rental properties that do not meet community standards. With that, focus staff operates a monthly Problem Property Committee including public safety, inspections, and housing staff. Enhancements to the code/rental inspections program have been implemented during 2019 (see “Housing Stock”). During 2019, the City addressed 775 code and housing property complaints and issued 402 rental licenses.

The City rates licensed rental properties on an A through C scale based on the quantity of code complaints. In 2017, 21.9% of licensed properties were rated “B” with 3.9% rated as “C” properties. For 2019, the percent of “B” properties had dropped to 16% of the total with the percent of “C” properties at 0.7%. The balance in both years would have received “A” ratings. It is also notable that 97% of licensed rental properties are now I&I compliant, up from 95% in 2018 and 75% in 2017.

In October 2019, the Public Safety standing committee of the City Council began study of a housing rehab program expansion. A recommendation for a specific program expansion is being brought forward early in 2020.

The City considered creation of a Housing Improvement Area (HIA) during the 2018-19 timeframe. This mechanism provides a financing opportunity for exterior and systems improvements for condominium associations where the association is responsible for maintenance and for which typical market financing may not be available. Ultimately the contemplated project, proposed at April Manor (Charlton south of Wentworth) did not proceed. However, we anticipate future opportunities with other similar properties.

- **Branding and Identity**

A facet of branding for West St. Paul includes success and appearance of public and privately owned properties within the community. Advancing our brand, thus, includes development and redevelopment activities. Included this year is \$12M in improvements (total) to Garlough and Moreland Schools. Also the new \$1.8M Solas Salon, \$1.6M buildout of the Children's Clinic at 963 Robert, the \$1.4M remodel of Walmart, the new \$750K Southview Animal Hospital at 2000 Robert, the \$600K remodel of Taco Bell, the expansion of Michoacan a Pedir de Boca Ice Cream at Signal Hills, and build out of Tokyo Sushi at Southview Square and others. A total of \$36.36 MM in permit value 86% of which was commercial. The final plat for a Hy-Vee grocery store was approved in 2019 for 2020 anticipated construction.

Council has allocated funding to ensure that newly reconstructed Robert Street continues to create a draw for consumers. Included is an approximate \$60,000 allocation on litter and planting bed maintenance programming specifically for Robert Street. We have struggled to keep ahead of maintenance needs in this area and are intending to revisit our current approach. Through our Volunteer Program, we have been successful in improving citizen participation throughout the community on clean-up activities of roadways, parks, and transit stops.

We are focused on communication to stakeholders through internal/external newsletters, social media, and collaboration with NDC4 (Town Square Television) to promote City programming, events, and activities throughout the community. We hosted a number of stakeholder meetings including Council led listening sessions, public safety neighborhood meetings and events, coordination of ROMA (rental owners and managers) meetings and listening sessions as part of the Police Chief Selection process.

In 2019, we collaborated on a joint hosting of the West St. Paul Days event at Harmon Park during which we marketed WSP T-shirts. While the event venue was somewhat lightly attended (cold weather) T-shirt sales, which was a pilot marketing effort, met expectations. We are now also taking a more active role in planning ribbon cutting and groundbreaking events in concert with the Dakota County Chamber when one of their members is the end user.

- **Diversity and Inclusion**

Considerable recruitment efforts have been implemented since early 2018 resulting in a significant increase in number of diverse applicants. Five new diverse employees have been hired into permanent positions since 2017. Females have been hired or promoted into male-dominated jobs in Police, Police supervisory, and engineering intern.

During 2018, we established an outreach Committee to assist with our inclusion efforts. That committee was shelved during 2018 and has not yet been re-energized. However, internal communication enhancements such as a growing menu of dual language communication has been ongoing.

In June 2019, the City Council adopted a resolution recognizing Pride Month and in commemoration of the anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

- **Fiscal Constraints**

Perhaps our most significant 2019 achievement is legislative/gubernatorial adoption of a Local Option Sales Tax for WSP. Council approved implementation of this tax effective January 1, 2020, which is projected to generate \$28M over the next 20 years toward major maintenance (mill/overlay or reconstruction projects) of collector and high priority roadways over that span. As part of this initiative, Council has adopted changes in capital planning, fiscal and debt policies to set a direction toward debt reduction and improved fiscal metrics.

Resulting from the above is adoption of a 2020-2021 Budget with significantly lower property tax impacts than had been projected in the prior year. While the 2020 property tax levy still results in a property tax increase for many property owners that tax increase in many cases is moderate. At the same time, we ended 2019 in a positive position relative to budget and with a cash reserve above earlier projections. We anticipate the planned for reduction in outstanding bonded debt principal balance will begin in 2020 resulting from the measures adopted by the City Council in both 2018 and 2019.

The Council also approved installation of solar panels on the Public Works and City Hall roofs as well as a contract to join a solar garden consortium. The net will be long-term savings in energy payables at a de minimis capital investment by the City. In December, the Council adopted a resolution in support of Carbon pricing as part of our continuing sustainability focus.

- **Housing Stock**

During 2019, a number of new housing units were approved with additional projects in the queue at year-end. Five new single-family homes were permitted during 2019 at an average permit value just over \$333K. Also approved is the 174 unit affordable senior housing project by DARTS/REE, on Marthaler Lane, a portion of TIF revenues from which are targeted toward future housing rehab programs (in the out years of the district). This project will be completed in June 2020. At Robert and Haskell, another senior facility with 18 assisted living (18 units) and 14 memory care units will be constructed during 2020. A 152-unit market rate housing project was approved for the former Thompson Oaks golf course property. The real estate closing for this project is anticipated by May 2020 with the construction start immediately thereafter. The Council has received proposals by the CDA for 60 units of affordable housing on the 900 Block of Robert and for 367 units of workforce and affordable senior housing at Butler and Robert. Final entitlement considerations of both these projects are to occur during 2020. The grand opening for the Rooftop 252 market multi-family project on Marie Avenue was July 19.

The City Council approved an updated three-year contract with Dakota County for administration of CDBG entitlement funds. In West St. Paul, program funds are targeted toward housing rehab programming. This year, staff has revamped the Code Enforcement/Rental Inspections program to assign staff toward both aspects of the program with assignments either east or west of Robert Street. Compliance correspondence has also

been amended to include photo depictions of non-compliant features of a complaint as suggested by members of Council.

- **Infrastructure and Public Facilities**

The 2019 City administered Street Improvement Project was reconstruction of Livingston Avenue. There were a number of County led projects as well, which are noted above. Additionally, the State let Smith Avenue reconstruction project finished up during 2019. Public Works staff completed a one-mile drive lane temporary bituminous mat on Annapolis from Smith to Robert. The 2020-21 budget includes an allocation to the street department to continue similar mat construction in future years. With the infusion of projected Sales Tax revenues from 2020 to 2039 the Council was able to amend the CIP (Capital Improvement Program) to provide a “pay as you go” approach to all future streets, parks, and facilities projects going forward. While 2020 will be somewhat of a respite year with only a very modest mill/overlay project in the plan, starting with 2021 WSP will be able to take a very structure approach to overlay and reconstruction projects well into the future without taking on additional debt. As noted above, that approach allows for the retirement of about \$3.5MM in principal balance each year that additional debt is not sold.

Under 2019 adopted Council policy the lone exception to the “pay-go” approach is for replacement of sanitary lift stations and force mains, which are considered critical infrastructure. During 2019 force main 1 was replaced. The plan is to replace or rebuild between 2020 and 2024 lift stations 1,2, and 4 and force mains 2,3,4, and 6. At that point, all of our non-gravity sanitary infrastructure will have been reconstructed within a recent period. During 2019, the City received the LMC City of Excellence Award for its I&I program which also received property owner beneficial amendments during the year.

In 2017-2018 the City replaced all of the HVAC units on City Hall (but for those on the Fire Department which were newer than all of the others) and the entire roof on this facility. We have also reconstructed all of the parking lots and replaced overhead doors. In total, addressed deferred maintenance on this building at an investment of \$1,054,887 through 2018.

In 2019, Council awarded contracts to replace all of the windows in City Hall. That \$173,763 project, though approved, has been delayed to 2020. The reason for the delay is the award of the \$1.1 million remodel of the police portion of the City Hall project for which the window project has of necessity needed to become a part. The police remodel includes some common space impacts. The project began in December 2019 and will be complete by June 2020.

- **Parks**

The City Council has adopted changes to the CIP and fiscal policies that include limiting future debt incurred to fund Park development projects. However, due to projects in queue and through third party funding there are a number of enhancements to the Parks system underway. Concurrent with the Wentworth reconstruction project \$150,000 in improvements were made to the north side of Marthaler Park including storm water facilities and a new

parking lot. The City also acquired a new playground for the north side of the park for 2020 installation (had not previously been a north side playground). Smaller improvements were made to Oakdale and Haskell Parks and at the Sports Complex. We continue to undertake scheduled improvements at both the Pool and Arena. During 2019, we received customer requests to expand the Arena with dry floor and locker facilities. This proposal hit two Council OCWS agendas during 2019 with a potential for project consideration during 2020.

During 2019, we went through a planning process with County and other governmental stakeholders to develop a wetland reclamation project in the former Thompson Oaks golf course property. This project coordinates with future construction of a portion of the R2R regional trailway and with phase 2 development of a housing project adjacent to Oakdale Avenue. Council approved Grant funding requests during 2019 and to date one of three has received funding approval. Second round requests for the other two are anticipated in May 2020.

- **Recreation**

The recreation department initiated some new collaborative programming in 2019. A new joint program with Mendota Heights called “Tour de Rec”, traveled to different parks throughout West St Paul and Mendota Heights. Every 2 weeks youth 6-12 years old were welcomed at a designated park for 1.5 hours of free recreation programming. Staff led the group games, sports, crafts, art and more. This is a free drop in program with no registration needed. It was a very well received program and staff plans to run it weekly in 2020. Recreation staff also collaborated with the YMCA to offer free “Fitness in the Park” classes this summer. This inaugural program, open to all ages, was offered at three varying times and locations during 2019. This program was also well received and staff is working with the YMCA to expand this partnership in 2020. West St Paul collaborated with Mendota Heights and South St Paul to hold the first annual light up the night “Glow Dash” in September. This 1.36-mile dash is designed for all ages and abilities. The modest fee covered refreshments and a glow swag bag for each of the 58 registered participants. Given the success staff plans to repeat this program in 2020.

Staff once again offered free movies in the park, youth safety camp as well as many other programs. Other new programs offered in 2019 include art and musical theater camps, music together programs for parents and young children, new parent child birthing classes.

The City continues to offer programming and public recreational opportunities at the Ice Arena, the outdoor swimming pool and the Sports Dome. The summer pool program is in its last contract year with the YMCA as the operator in 2020. We entered a new five-year contract with SFD in 2019.

A number of grants and donations were received in 2019 to help offset costs within the department. These include a \$25,000 tree planting DNR grant that offset the costs of the City’s Emerald Ash Borer Management Plan, donations from the SRSBA for youth safety camps, and many volunteer hours to help programs and community events run smoothly.